



STEPS AHEAD NEW TRENDS IN THE ANALYSIS OF ROMAN POLYTHEISM

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
Universidad Carlos III de Madrid
Campus Puerta de Toledo
25-27 October 2023

Call for Papers

This conference is the culmination of the work of research project “*Religion: The Individual and the Communitas*” (RICO), funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation (ref. no. PID2020-117176GB-I00). The aim of this project is to increase our knowledge of the ways in which, in the context of Roman polytheism, individuals and communities interacted with the supernatural.

Over the last twenty years, there has been a dramatic transformation in the way scholars view Roman religion, following the development of a number of new theoretical and methodological approaches, inspired by disciplines such as anthropology, archaeology, philosophy, psychology, or sociology.

For example, the Roman world provides an excellent framework to observe the interaction of the regional with the global. Within the Roman *oikoumene*, cults are no longer perceived as “monolithic” ethnocultural phenomena, liable to be transferred *en masse* from one place to another. Rather, they are conceptualised as cultural adaptations experienced situationally by different local communities and individuals (men and women) across the territory of the Empire. These processes of reception and change are, needless to say, based on existing social networks. Moreover, they are built by a series of specific actors on dynamics of social interaction (conflicts, intersections, resonance, etc.) that multiply religious options and generate an actual “religious market”, fuelling competition for material resources and divine favour. This competition triggers a religious experience enacted through new ritual media, new divine invocations, new sensorialities, new bodily and mental dispositions, constructions of new identities, etc.

The new perspectives on Roman religion have called into question previously consolidated historical-religious notions that failed to properly grasp the complex

dynamics of religious continuation and change in the Roman Mediterranean, such as “acculturation”, “assimilation”, “diffusionism”, “imperialism”, “indigenism”, “pagan monotheism”, “revivalism”, “Romanisation”, “syncretism”, etc. Different concepts like “appropriation”, “communication”, “embodiment”, “glocalisation”, “hybridisation”, “middle ground”, “reception”, “transfer”, etc. have been instead proposed to analyse these cultural processes with an emphasis on human agency, multiculturalism, and local and non-standard developments.

The aim of this congress is to contribute to the ongoing theoretical discussion on these conceptual tools by offering new reflections on their general or contextual value and applicability and, at the same time, to provide cases-studies in each of the following panels:

1. “Religious competition”. Keynote speaker: Greg Woolf (UCLA)

Following John North’s proposal of the notion of “religious market” in 1992, a number of scholars have delved into this commercial metaphor to define competition among ancient cults from an economic perspective. From this perspective, cults and individuals are understood as religious “firms” and “consumers”, respectively, and the relation between them is conceptualised in terms of “supply” and “demand”. In line with recent attempts to broaden this approach beyond its economic limits, this panel aims to provide an insight into the different levels of religious competitiveness, freedom of choice and the simultaneous availability of different religious practices in antiquity. Such freedom and supply is mediated by a social agentivity that entails the dialectic between different cultic groups, the individual experience (and expectations) and the gregarious potential of certain religious practices. We encourage proposals that address this perspective, including the capacities attributed to deities through onomastic chains and iconographic features, or the emergence of new locative, migrant, or global cults that adapted to the new cultural reality and spread throughout the Roman Empire.

2. “Urban religion”. Keynote speaker: Emiliano Rubens Urciuoli (Università Bologna)

As a natural development of the *LAR - Lived Ancient Religion* perspective, which tried to overcome the limits of the concepts of “polis-” and “civic religion”, the “Urban Religion” approach focuses on the city as a space informed by and informing specific social patterns, and on religion as a sphere of activity that stimulates processes of urbanisation and is in turn shaped by urbanity. The *Religion and Urbanity* project, conducted at the University of Erfurt (2018-) under the direction of Susanne Rau and Jörg Rüpke, supports Emiliano R. Urciuoli’s concept of “citification” of religion as a phenomenon that urged religious actors to “adopt and adapt city features”. A city is assumed to be a place where religion is used as an instrument to achieve a series of “urban aspirations” pursued by different groups living together, the materialisation

of which is often displayed in opposition to the religion established by the institutions. A parallel process is the adoption and adaptation of rural features, which Valentino Gasparini has designated as religious “rurification”. This panel encourages papers on these two, apparently opposed but in fact complementary dynamics, with the double aim of exploring the intersections between them and testing the value, usefulness, and limits of the conceptual tools coined for their study.

3. “Religious networks”. Keynote speaker: Anna Collar (University of Southampton)

Over the last fifteen years, an increasing number of studies have used Social Network Analysis to explain the transmission and reception across the ancient Mediterranean of religious phenomena of very different nature, such as the cults of Artemis, Bona Dea, Isis, Jupiter Dolichenus, Mithras, etc., or the Judaism of the diaspora. These works have shown that the categorisation and analysis of the ties between different social and religious agents (nodes) can be examined through methodologies as diverse as Proximal Point Analysis (PPA), small-world dynamics, centrality theories (betweenness and closeness), or even the use of complex mathematical and computational models. This panel intends to explore the potential of such methodologies in the study of divine epithets, iconographies, rituals, etc.

4. “Exploring Resonanz”. Keynote speaker: Wolfgang Spickermann (Universität Graz)

The publication in 2016 of *Resonanz* by the sociologist Harmut Rosa provided an opportunity to apply his interaction theory to the study of change in Roman religion. As an further development/ spin-off of the Erfurt LAR program, a joint project has been launched at the Universities of Graz and Erfurt, led by Wolfgang Spickermann and Jörg Rüpke: *Resonante Weltbeziehungen in sozio-religiösen Praktiken in Antike und Gegenwart*.

The aim of this panel is to explore the validity of this analytical model for the study of Roman polytheism. It is not a matter of using a new nomenclature to refer to known phenomena. Resonance is not “echo”, it is not “imitation”, nor “reception”. It requires individuals and groups in action, willing to adopt new ways of being in the world. Resonance is a process through which the vibrations coming from an emitter are perceived and readapted by a *communitas* in a specific space named “oasis of resonance”. This panel will explore the limits of the theoretical model of resonance applied to Roman polytheism through case-studies.

5. “Sensoriality, embodiment, emotions and materiality”. Keynote speaker: Emma-Jayne Graham (Open University UK)

Following the emerging trends in sensory studies, our research team, in collaboration with Greg Woolf, organised in 2017 the SENSORIVM conference (RGRW 195, 2021), devoted to the sensoriality of Roman polytheism. Our aim now is to go further in that

direction by exploring the *sensory turn* even more in depth, both from a theoretical point of view and from specific case studies. To this end, three research lines may be opened, exploring 1) the material turn; 2) embodiment; and 3) emotions, in order to expand our knowledge of the role played by sensoriality in the Roman religion.

Organisation Committee: Jaime Alvar Ezquerra (Universidad Carlos III de Madrid), Lorena Pérez Yarza (Universidad Carlos III de Madrid), José Carlos López Gómez (Universidad de Málaga)

Secretary: Pablo Rodríguez Valdés (Universidad Carlos III de Madrid)

Paper presentations should be approximately 25 minutes and can be delivered in Spanish, Portuguese, English, German, French, or Italian. They must be original works that have neither been published nor presented before. **Interested contributors** should fill the **application form**, which includes an abstract of their proposal (500-600 words) and a short bio, by **February 28 2023**. Proposals must be sent to the email RICOconference@uc3m.es

The editing and publication costs will be covered by the Conference organizers but due to strict public budget controls, **the contributors should send their manuscripts (only accepted in English) before May 1, 2024**. In exchange, the organizers will commit to publish the Conference volume during 2025.